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Sen. Brown's proposal would control farm odors, promote alternative energy

WEDNESDAY, February 4, 2004 – Sen. Cameron S. Brown unveiled legislation today that will create a structure for advancing alternative energy sources and help control one of rural Michigan's most widely reported complaints: odors originating from high-intensity livestock operations.

"This legislative package is a 'win-win' for farmers and the environment," said Brown (R-Fawn River Township). "The bill package encourages alternative energy development, particularly methane digesters, and helps farmers better manage farm odor and manure. Farmers in southern Michigan will have a way to save money on energy costs and have the ability to actually sell energy on the market, while the state can take a step forward in addressing pressing environmental concerns."

Farmers who use methane digesters process animal waste using treatment technology that yields methane gas and at the same time reduces the volume of solids and liquids. In the process of creating clean energy, methane digesters neutralize harmful pathogens in animal waste to create an end product that can be used as a beneficial fertilizer for agriculture. The energy produced in this process can be used to generate electricity for the farm or it can be sold on the energy market.

"During these difficult times it is important that Americans strive for self-sufficiency in energy production," Brown said. "This legislative package is a step in that direction. It will help protect the environment, allow farmers to be productive, and secure a future for Michigan's farm economy in the 21st century."

Many industry observers feel Michigan farmers are at a crossroads both economically and environmentally. To help address environmental concerns, many feel it is necessary to explore ways to manage odor and animal waste from high-intensity livestock operations.

Brown's legislation recognizes that technology is available, however, the costs to set up systems that can help control odor and manage manure are very high.

Brown's three-bill package will help farmers with a tax break for system setup, create a mechanism for funding, and establish a fair rate for unused generated energy that is sold to electric companies.

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